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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

(for the period from 21 January 2005 to 20 July 2005)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 1583 (2005) of 28 January 2005, by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) for a further period of six months, until 31 July 2005. It covers developments since the previous report, dated 20 January 2005 (S/2005/36).

2. The report also contains recommendations on UNIFIL's mandate and structures as requested in Security Council resolution 1583 (2005) based on a Department of Peacekeeping Operations assessment mission to Lebanon from 8 to 14 May. The mission reviewed the deployment concept and troop strength of UNIFIL, evaluated its role in fulfilling its current mandate, assessed the current political environment and its implications for UNIFIL, evaluated the situation along the Blue Line and analysed the consequences for the mandate of any possible adjustments to the Force. The mission consulted with the Lebanese authorities, representatives of the diplomatic community and representatives of the United Nations system.

II. Situation in the area of operation

3. A fragile quiet prevailed in the UNIFIL area of operation during most of the period under review, although the situation was often marked by tension. Violations of the Blue Line continued throughout the past six months, most often in the form of recurring air violations by Israeli jets, helicopters and drones as well as ground violations, from the Lebanese side, primarily by Lebanese shepherds. There was, in addition, one Lebanese air violation by a Hizbollah drone. Hostilities in the area escalated in May with armed exchanges between Hizbollah and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and with rocket firing by unidentified armed elements. The situation deteriorated significantly on 29 June, when Hizbollah and IDF engaged in a heavy exchange of fire in the Shab'a farms area, resulting in the death of one IDF soldier, the wounding of four others and the death of two Hizbollah soldiers.

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4. The series of incidents in May took place as follows: on 9 May, IDF reported to UNIFIL that it had accidentally fired a shell into Lebanon, in an open area east of Al-Khiam, in the course of an operation to destroy booby traps in the Shab'a farms area and on 11 May, a Katyusha rocket, fired by unidentified armed elements from the vicinity of Naqoura in Lebanon, landed in the Israeli town of Shelomi. Although there was property damage, there was no reaction from IDF. The following day, IDF claimed that Hizbollah launched two missiles from the vicinity of Ghajar into the Shab'a farms, but no impact was reported by UNIFIL. While UNIFIL was unable to verify this claim, local residents reported hearing explosions. Subsequently, on 13 May, IDF and Hizbollah exchanged fire. UNIFIL first recorded small arms fire from the vicinity of an IDF position in the Shab'a farms area. Local Lebanese residents claimed that a house in Kafr Shuba was hit. Several loud explosions followed near IDF positions in the area. Hizbollah claimed responsibility for an attack, stating that it came in retaliation for IDF machine gun fire into Kafr Shuba that morning and for the firing of the shell by IDF on 9 May. Subsequently, IDF launched tank and artillery rounds, six aerial bombs and several rockets into a broad swathe of Lebanese territory from Kafr Kila to Shab'a. At the same time, there was an exchange of fire between IDF and Hizbollah in the general area south of Rmaich. Lastly, on 21 May, IDF opened small arms fire to ward off Lebanese shepherds who violated the Blue Line in the Shab'a farms area. Local residents reported that three houses in Shab'a village had been hit. Subsequently, Hizbollah fired several artillery and mortar rounds towards IDF positions in the area, stating that this was in retaliation for the IDF fire on Shab'a village. IDF responded with artillery, tank and mortar fire, with rounds impacting in the area between Ghajar and Kafr Shuba. No casualties were reported in these incidents.

5. The sequence of events on 29 June began when a group of Hizbollah fighters that had crossed the Blue Line was detected by an IDF patrol and an exchange of fire between them ensued. Hizbollah then started firing mortar rounds at several IDF positions in the Shab'a farms area. IDF responded by firing artillery and two tank rounds in an area extending from east of Al-Khiam village to Kafr Shuba. IDF helicopters also fired four missiles at Hizbollah positions near Hula causing a fire at one position. At the same time, IDF fired artillery rounds from a position opposite the Rmaich area. Subsequently, IDF dropped seven aerial bombs on a Hizbollah position in the Shab'a farms area. As noted in paragraph 3 above, the events resulted in the death of one IDF soldier, the wounding of four others and the death of two Hizbollah fighters. The observation tower of one UNIFIL position was hit by eight rounds and IDF tank rounds and one aerial bomb impacted close to two other UNIFIL positions. There were no injuries to United Nations personnel during the exchanges. The following day, IDF helicopters were reported to have violated Lebanese airspace and dropped leaflets over the cities of Sur (Tyre), Sidon and Beirut. Since then, the Shab'a farms area has been tense but quiet.

6. On 12 July, three Hizbollah fighters crawled within 10 metres of the barbed wire around the technical fence near United Nations position 1-32A, south of Naqoura, and fired four AK-47 rounds at an IDF position. IDF soldiers did not respond to the firing. Later that day, several Israeli aircraft violated Lebanese air space.

7. Throughout these hostilities, UNIFIL was in close contact with the parties, urging them to exercise maximum restraint. UNIFIL's intervention contributed to

avoiding further deterioration and prevented the incidents from spiralling out of control.

8. From 29 June to 12 July, UNIFIL experienced continuous restrictions by IDF on its use of helicopters, including for patrolling the Blue Line, and was not able to fly east of the United Nations position near Ghajar village. Also during this period, the IDF Liaison Officer for the Northern Command indicated to the UNIFIL Senior Adviser that, in future, IDF would limit its cooperation with UNIFIL in the Shab'a farms area.

9. Other incidents of note during the reporting period included the discovery by a UNIFIL patrol, on 4 March, of two Katyusha rockets in the general area of Markaba. The rockets were located about one and a half kilometres from the Blue Line, ready to be fired and aimed in the direction of Israeli territory. At the request of UNIFIL, the Lebanese security forces defused and removed the rockets. In another instance, Lebanese security forces reported that they discovered and removed a Katyusha rocket near Addaisseh village on 4 June. The rocket was reportedly set in a firing position and was located about two kilometres from the Blue Line.

10. The Israeli Air Force continued their air incursions into Lebanon, violating its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The overflights occurred sporadically, but in considerable numbers at times, disturbing the relative calm along the Blue Line. As in the past, Israeli aircraft often penetrated deep into Lebanon, sometimes generating sonic booms over populated areas. The pattern of air violations identified in my previous reports continued, whereby the aircraft would sometimes fly out to sea and enter Lebanese airspace north of the UNIFIL area of operation. Israeli officials maintain their position that the overflights would be carried out whenever Israel deems it necessary.

11. There were no instances of Hizbollah anti-aircraft fire across the Blue Line during the reporting period. However, on 11 April, Hizbollah launched, for the second time, an unmanned aerial vehicle, or drone, across the Blue Line, violating Israeli airspace. Hizbollah announced that it had operated the drone in response to Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace and declared that it would continue to fly such aircraft over Israel's territory. It claimed that the drone flew over Israeli territory for 18 minutes before returning to Lebanon and landing in the general area of Naqoura.

12. UNIFIL recorded a number of Lebanese ground violations of the Blue Line, primarily by shepherds, in the Shab'a farms and Ghajar areas. Such violations continued as a daily routine, often involving the same local shepherds. UNIFIL has urged the Lebanese authorities to prevent these ground violations. The risk that they could lead to more serious incidents was demonstrated on several occasions, in particular in May, when IDF fired shots in the air to ward off the shepherds. In a few instances, IDF fired small and medium arms fire across the Blue Line, mainly in the Shab'a farms area. UNIFIL has called upon the Israeli authorities to halt such actions, as firing across the withdrawal line has the potential for escalation.

13. My senior representatives in the region and I, as well as concerned Member States, have repeatedly called upon the Governments of Israel and Lebanon to cease all violations and fully respect the Blue Line. We also reminded the parties that one violation cannot justify another. It should also be emphasized that the air activity

from both sides poses a significant risk to UNIFIL helicopter patrols along the Blue Line.

14. No new improvised explosive devices were discovered along the Blue Line. However, IDF relayed that at least one set of explosive devices was discovered deep inside the Shab'a farms area. On 24 April, UNIFIL heard a distant explosion, coming from inside the Shab'a farms area, but no report was received from IDF and no casualties were reported.

15. The Lebanese Joint Security Force, comprised of army and internal security forces, and the Lebanese Army continued to operate in the areas vacated by Israel in May 2000. The strength and activity of the Joint Security Force remained the same and their routine activities continued with an increase in operations and a more visible presence at the beginning of June during the parliamentary elections in the south. At the request of UNIFIL, the Joint Security Force intervened on a few occasions to control demonstrations and prevent the protestors from approaching the Blue Line facing IDF positions in order to avert possible incidents, specifically attempts to damage the technical fence. Nevertheless, the Government of Lebanon continues to maintain the position that as long as there is no comprehensive peace with Israel Lebanese armed forces will not be deployed along the Blue Line.

16. On 6 and 9 June, the Lebanese Army vacated two of its three checkpoints in the UNIFIL area of operation; one on the road from Naqoura to the Israeli border, close to the United Nations position south of Naqoura, and a second between Bayt Yahum and Tibnin. Also on 9 June, the status of the Lebanese Army presence at an outpost in the Naqoura fishing harbour was reduced from permanent to occasional. Lebanese authorities stated that the planned measures were part of an overall redeployment of the army throughout the country as a result of a reduction in its troop strength from 60,000 to 40,000 troops. Ten days later, Hizbollah set up a new checkpoint of its own on the road from Naqoura to the border with Israel at Ras Naqoura in the vicinity of the southern entrance of UNIFIL headquarters. Hizbollah took over traffic control on this road and prevented civilian movement to the border. Following meetings with the Lebanese authorities, at which UNIFIL expressed grave concern over the closure of the army positions and the ensuing establishment of a Hizbollah position nearby, UNIFIL was informed that the checkpoint along the Naqoura-Ras-Naqoura road would be reinstated and that troops would be deployed on a permanent basis in the Naqoura fishing harbour. The checkpoint near Tibnin would be dismantled as it no longer served its purpose, with several roads running parallel to the checkpoint. On 1 July, the Lebanese Army re-established the checkpoint on the Naqoura-Ras-Naqoura road at the original location, manning it with four soldiers. Hizbollah subsequently dismantled its checkpoint. The Lebanese authorities informed UNIFIL that the army would maintain the checkpoint at Al-Mansouri on the Sur (Tyre)-Naqoura road.

17. Hizbollah maintained a visible presence near the Blue Line with its permanent observation posts, temporary checkpoints and patrols, carrying out construction work to fortify and expand some of their fixed positions. Some of this construction and expansion was done in close proximity to United Nations positions, posing additional security risks to United Nations personnel and equipment. The construction work continues to this date, despite several objections UNIFIL addressed to the Lebanese authorities.

18. UNIFIL occasionally encountered temporary denials of access by Hizbollah and threats to United Nations patrols. Nevertheless, UNIFIL was able to regain and assert its freedom of movement within a very short period of time.

19. Demonstrations on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line occurred periodically at points of friction identified in my previous reports, namely Sheikh Abbad Hill, east of Hula, and Fatima gate, west of Metulla. The demonstrators occasionally threw stones and other objects at IDF positions and, on at least two occasions, attempted to pull down the technical fence. These incidents caused apprehension among IDF personnel and carried the potential for turning violent.

20. The matter of water supply from the Hasbani River to the divided village of Ghajar, which had not been an issue of contention since 2002, resurfaced in May as a result of a low level of water in the river. The water supply system for the village is located on the Lebanese side of the Blue Line, and consists of two pumps on the west bank and two pumps and a reservoir on the east bank of the river, connected by a pipe on the river bed. In the spring of 2002, after the connecting pipe was washed away, the pumps on the west bank were disconnected and have not been used since. Sufficient rainfall ensured that the water pumps on the east bank of the river were adequate to provide water to the village. This year, however, the low water level in the river resulted in a serious shortage of water in the village. Civilian technicians from the village attempted to cross the river to activate the two pumps located on its west bank but were prevented from crossing by Lebanese authorities. Further to discussions with my Personal Representative, the Government of Lebanon stated that any maintenance work on either the east or west bank pumps should not result in an increase in the volume of water provided to Ghajar village when compared with the amount pumped previously. My Personal Representative continues to be in close contact with both the Lebanese and Israeli authorities with the aim of resolving this matter.

21. Parliamentary elections, which were held in southern Lebanon on 5 June, were carried out in an orderly manner, with no major incidents. The successful conduct and the outcome of the elections are expected to strengthen government structures and authority in the area, speed up the integration of the formerly occupied zone with the rest of the country and provide the conditions for improvement in the socio-economic situation in the south.

22. UNIFIL provided humanitarian assistance to the Lebanese civilian population in the form of medical care, water projects, equipment and services for schools and orphanages and social services for the needy. UNIFIL assistance was provided from resources made available primarily by troop-contributing countries and donations by individual Governments. UNIFIL cooperated closely on humanitarian matters with the Lebanese authorities, United Nations agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, several embassies and other organizations and agencies operating in Lebanon.

23. The presence of a large number of minefields in the UNIFIL area of operation, located mainly along the Blue Line, remained a matter of serious concern. Since January, two Lebanese civilians were killed and three injured as a result of mine explosions. UNIFIL continued its operational mine clearance activities, demolishing some 300 mines and pieces of unexploded ordnance. UNIFIL also carried out regular mine-risk education for schoolchildren.

24. Following an increase in civilian mine casualties in the area along the Blue Line, a joint United Nations and Lebanese Army team conducted an assessment and subsequently initiated a programme to repair damaged or missing minefield fencing and erect new fencing where required. During this period, some 9 kilometres of minefield frontage along the Blue Line posing a direct threat to the civilian community was marked and fenced by a Lebanese Army team working in coordination with the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre.

III. Organizational matters

25. UNIFIL operations remained concentrated along the Blue Line. The Force is deployed within its area of operation to support the restoration of international peace and security in southern Lebanon by working to maintain the ceasefire along the Blue Line through ground and air patrols of its area of operation, observation from fixed positions and close contacts with the parties, the latter with a view to correcting violations, resolving incidents and preventing escalation. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), through the Observer Group Lebanon, supported UNIFIL in the fulfilment of its mandate.

26. In accordance with Security Council resolution 1583 (2005), in May an assessment team from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations visited UNIFIL and held consultations in Beirut with Lebanese military and government officials, representatives of the diplomatic community and representatives of the United Nations system with the aim of presenting recommendations to the Council for its review of the UNIFIL mandate and structures. In its discussions, the team focused on assessing the continuing requirements of the Force to carry out activities in fulfilling its mandate and what developments in the situation on the ground might justify a change to the configuration and mandate of UNIFIL.

27. The team found that the military situation in southern Lebanon and in the vicinity of the Blue Line between Lebanon and Israel had not changed significantly since December 2002, when UNIFIL was reconfigured to its current role and size. The two UNIFIL battalions, provided by India and Ghana, continually monitor the approaches to the Blue Line through observation and patrolling from 21 military positions close to the Blue Line supported by 19 intermediate and depth positions. These activities are supported by UNIFIL helicopter patrols and the activities of Observer Group Lebanon operating from four patrol bases. Through their coordinated activities, UNIFIL and the Observer Group have the ability to investigate and verify operationally sensitive issues, establish liaison with the parties to the conflict and thereby reduce tensions and incidents on the Blue Line. It is important to note that there are no formal links between the Governments or defence forces of Israel and Lebanon. UNIFIL is therefore the principal source of liaison on military matters between the countries. In the assessment team's view, UNIFIL, in conjunction with the Observer Group, has the appropriate size, capabilities, structure and deployment to undertake its tasks in a professional and efficient manner in accordance with its existing mandate and regional conditions and it maintains adequate capacity and flexibility to respond to its probable tasks over the next six months.

28. As at 30 June 2005, UNIFIL comprised 1,992 troops, from France (206), Ghana (652), India (648), Ireland (5), Italy (52), Poland (233) and Ukraine (196).

UNIFIL was assisted in its tasks by 51 UNTSO military observers. A map showing the current deployment of UNIFIL is attached. In addition, UNIFIL employed 393 civilian staff, of whom 103 were recruited internationally and 290 locally. Major General Alain Pellegrini (France) continued as Force Commander. Geir Pedersen, who was appointed as my Personal Representative, took up his duties from Staffan de Mistura in April.

29. Since the establishment of UNIFIL, 246 members of the Force have lost their lives, 79 as a result of firings or bomb explosions, 105 as a result of accidents and 62 from other causes. A total of 345 members of the Force have been wounded by firing or mine explosions.

IV. Financial matters

30. By its resolution 59/307 of 22 June 2005, the General Assembly appropriated to the Special Account for UNIFIL the amount of $94.3 million gross, equivalent to $7.9 million per month, for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2005 to 30 June 2006. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 July 2005, as recommended in paragraph 40 below, the cost of maintaining the Force will be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

31. As at 30 June 2005, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNIFIL amounted to $54.4 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at the same date amounted to $1,729.2 million.

V. Observations

32. During a period characterized by heightened political uncertainty in the country, southern Lebanon enjoyed a relative calm. Nevertheless, the hostilities that occurred in May and the grave incident on 29 June demonstrated once more that the situation remains volatile and fragile, with the potential for a deterioration of conditions. Both Israel and Lebanon regularly declare their desire to avoid confrontation and destabilization of the area. I encourage the parties to do their utmost to avoid all violations of the Blue Line and to promote calm. To that end, I reiterate my call on all the parties to abide by their obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions and to exercise utmost restraint in order to contribute to stability in the wider region.

33. The rocket firing incident across the Blue Line into Israel in May, perpetrated by unidentified armed elements, carried significant potential for military escalation. It should be noted that IDF acted with restraint, and did not respond militarily to the attack. The Lebanese authorities have taken an official position against such attacks emanating from their territory and expressed a commitment to halting the infringements.

34. It remains a matter of deep concern that Israel continues to use air incursions to violate Lebanese sovereignty and territorial integrity. The air incursions elevate tension and disrupt the fragile calm along the Blue Line. There were no instances of anti-aircraft fire across the Line during this period. Attention should be drawn, however, to the violation of Israeli air space by a drone from Lebanese territory. I

wish to reiterate our consistent position that there should be no air violations from either side of the Line and also wish to remind all parties that all hostile acts must stop and that one violation cannot justify another. Noting with concern the recent limitations put by IDF on UNIFIL helicopter patrols along the Line, I wish to reiterate the Security Council's call on the parties to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL.

35. Economic development of the south is inextricably linked to peace and security. I call upon the Government, international donors, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations to increase their efforts towards the economic rehabilitation and development of southern Lebanon.

36. Since the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri on 14 February, Lebanon has undergone a period of increased political instability, manifested by the large-scale demonstrations in the capital, the resignation of the Government, several bomb attacks in various areas of Beirut, the assassinations of journalist Samir Kassir and politician George Hawi and, most recently, the attack on the envoy of Defence Minister Elias Murr. The withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon by the end of April, made possible the holding of free and fair parliamentary elections over a four-week period in May and June. Lebanese armed forces now have to show that they can maintain effective security throughout the country at a time when the size of the Lebanese Army is being reduced significantly.

37. Stability in the area depends largely on the Government of Lebanon exercising its authority over all of its territory, however that level of authority and control remains limited. The Lebanese Army is deployed in areas at a distance to the Blue Line and the Joint Security Forces and Gendarmerie units conduct some mobile patrols and maintain some check-points in the area of operation. These circumstances make it possible for Hizbollah forces to be visible close to the Blue Line, to maintain posts that are sometimes immediately adjacent to IDF and UNIFIL positions and, at times, to carry out attacks across the Blue Line. I sincerely hope that the newly formed Government of Lebanon will seize the opportunities that the changed political situation in Lebanon presents and heed the Security Council's call to make strong efforts to return its full and effective authority throughout the south, including the deployment of Lebanese armed forces, and to do its utmost to ensure calm. I emphasize the pressing need for the Government to exert control over the use of force throughout its entire territory and to prevent attacks from Lebanon across the Blue Line.

38. Turning to the assessment carried out by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations team that visited Lebanon, I concur with its view that in the existing political and security situation in southern Lebanon, a combination of armed infantry and unarmed observers remains necessary for UNIFIL to carry out its mandated tasks. The current level of armed force is required to maintain the critical positions in the area of operation that monitor the Blue Line and its approaches and to provide appropriate protection for the personnel and assets of both UNIFIL and the Observer Group Lebanon.

39. Without exception, Lebanese authorities and diplomatic interlocutors with whom the assessment mission met, confirmed that in the currently prevailing uncertain political and security conditions as outlined above, UNIFIL continues to play a crucial role in implementing its mandate in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978). I believe that the present situation in Lebanon and the wider

region does not support a change in the UNIFIL mandate or another reconfiguration of the Force at this stage. It is my recommendation that in the current conditions, UNIFIL continue its work contributing to the restoration of international peace and security through observing, monitoring and reporting on developments in its area of operation and liaising with the parties to maintain calm.

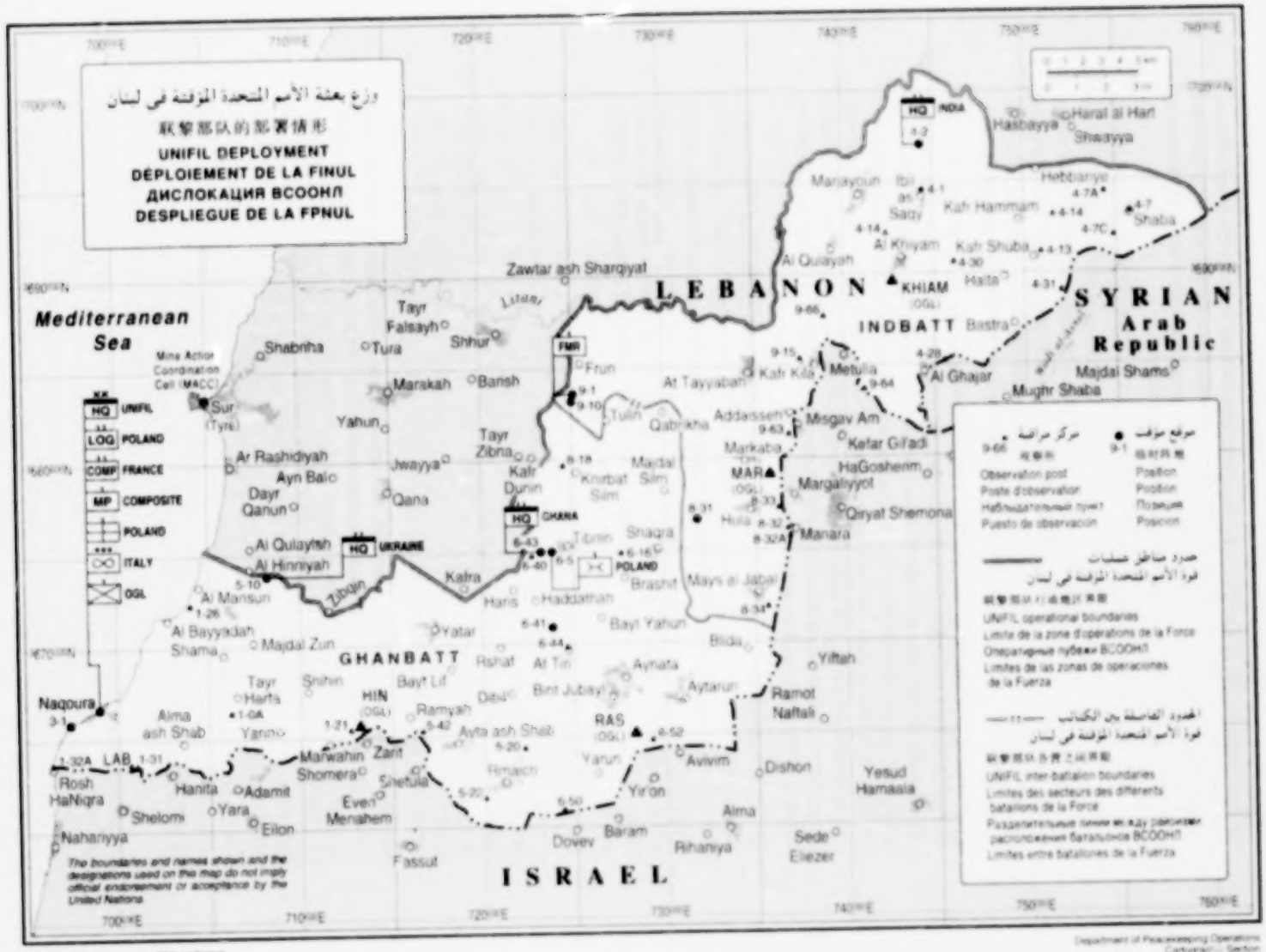
40. In a letter dated 11 July 2005 the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations addressed to me, he conveyed his Government's request that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of six months. In the light of the conditions prevailing in the area, I support the extension and recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 January 2006 with no changes to the strength and composition of the Force.

41. Taking into account the positive recent developments in Lebanon, but also recognizing the challenges the new Government of Lebanon will face, my Personal Representative will discuss with the Government the next steps in preparing for an expansion of its authority in the south and the support the United Nations can provide to achieve this. At the same time, UNIFIL stands ready to assist the Lebanese authorities in planning for the deployment of the army in the UNIFIL area of operation. The implications for UNIFIL of an increased presence of the Lebanese military in the south will be assessed continually.

42. My Personal Representative for Southern Lebanon and the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process will also continue their work to lend the political and diplomatic support of the United Nations to the parties in establishing lasting peace and security in southern Lebanon. The need to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), remains imperative.

43. In making the recommendation to extend the mandate of UNIFIL, I must again draw attention to the serious shortfall in the funding of the Force. At present, unpaid assessments amount to $54.4 million. This represents money owed to the Member States contributing the troops that make up the Force. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full, and to clear all remaining arrears. I should like to express my gratitude to the Governments contributing troops to the Force for their understanding and patience in these difficult circumstances.

44. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Special Coordinator, Alvaro De Soto, and my Personal Representative, Geir Pedersen, and to pay tribute to the Force Commander, Major General Alain Pellegrini, and the men and women of UNIFIL for the manner in which they have carried out their difficult and often dangerous task. Their discipline and bearing have been of a high order, reflecting credit on themselves, their countries and on the United Nations.



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